

Insights into job attachment, January 2025

Released 20/02/2025

i Source: [Labour Force, Australia, January 2025](#)

On this page

- [What is 'Job attachment'?](#)
- [Are all people with job attachment employed?](#)
- [Job attached populations](#)
- [People waiting to start work who were not in the labour force](#)
- [Unemployed future starters](#)
- [How to contact us with questions or feedback](#)

In January 2025, there was a higher number of people than usual who were not employed but were attached to a job, compared to what was observed before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this was less pronounced than in January 2022, 2023 and 2024, during a period of particularly tight labour market conditions, and following a period of considerable disruptions during the pandemic.

This article provides some analysis on this phenomenon, and provides an update on previous iterations of this article:

- [Insights into job attachment, January 2023 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-january-2023\)](#)
- [Insights into job attachment, January 2024 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-january-2024\)](#)

Additional January period data will provide further insights into the extent to which this is a temporary effect or a more enduring seasonal feature of the Australian labour market.

The ABS has also updated how Labour Force statistics measure some relatively small population groups from 2016 onwards. This has resulted in some minor differences between data presented in this article and previous versions. For further information, please see: [Improvements to Labour Force estimation method \(/articles/improvements-labour-force-estimation-method\)](#).

What is 'Job attachment'?

'Job attachment' refers to whether someone has a job that they are connected to.

Are all people with job attachment employed?

Whether someone has a job is one of a number of elements used by the ABS to determine whether someone is employed or not, together with whether they have worked an hour or more (or whether they were temporarily absent from work) and whether they have been paid. For more on how the ABS defines someone as employed, refer

to the [Glossary \(/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/jan-2024#glossary\)](/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/jan-2024#glossary).

Given employment is determined using multiple criteria, it is possible for someone to have attachment to a job without necessarily being employed. Prior to the pandemic, there was a relatively small number of people each month who were attached to a job but were not considered to be employed, peaking in January each year. These people are comprised of two groups:

1. The 'long-term away from work', people who have a job that they are away from without pay for more than a month (e.g. people on unpaid parental leave) and,
2. The 'waiting to start work', people who have a job but haven't started (or restarted) in it yet

These groups of people are included in either the unemployed or not in the labour force classification, according to their current availability to work and when the job could begin.

There is a small amount of overlap in the two groups, so the sub-components do not sum to the totals presented in this article.

For more on how the ABS categorises people outside of employment, see the ABS release on '[Potential workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release)'.

Job attached populations

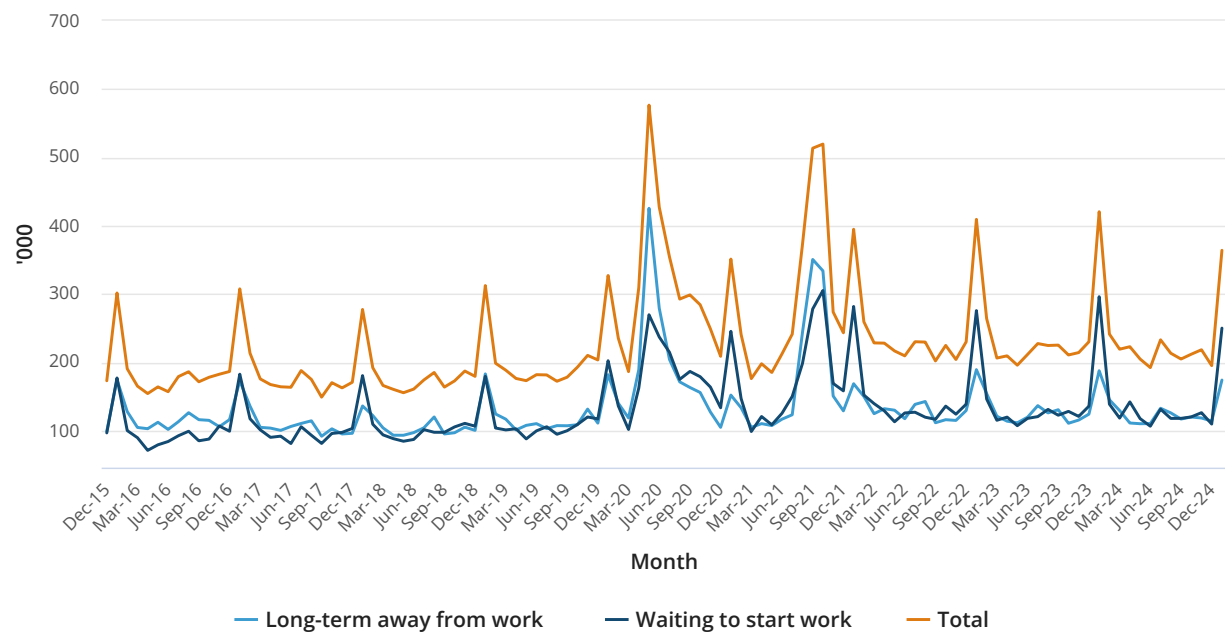
In this article, the pre-COVID average is calculated as the average of each January for the 5 years between 2016 to 2020. Seasonal adjustment of Labour Force estimates accounts for the shifting reference period at the beginning of January each year. As this analysis has been conducted using Labour Force original series, direct comparisons of January data and pre-COVID averages needs to be assessed with these changing seasonal effects in mind.

Chart 1 shows the job attached populations over time. There are clear seasonal peaks in January for both populations, as well as large increases at various points in 2020 and 2021 when lockdown measures were implemented and then lifted.

You can find more information about the impacts of the lockdowns on job attachment, when these insights were particularly valuable, in these articles:

- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, October 2021 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic\)](/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic)
- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, November 2021 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-november-2021\)](/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-november-2021)
- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, January 2022 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-january-2022\)](/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-january-2022)
- [Insights into job attachment during the pandemic, February 2022 \(/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-february-2022\)](/articles/insights-job-attachment-during-pandemic-february-2022)

Chart 1: People who were not employed with job attachment, Original



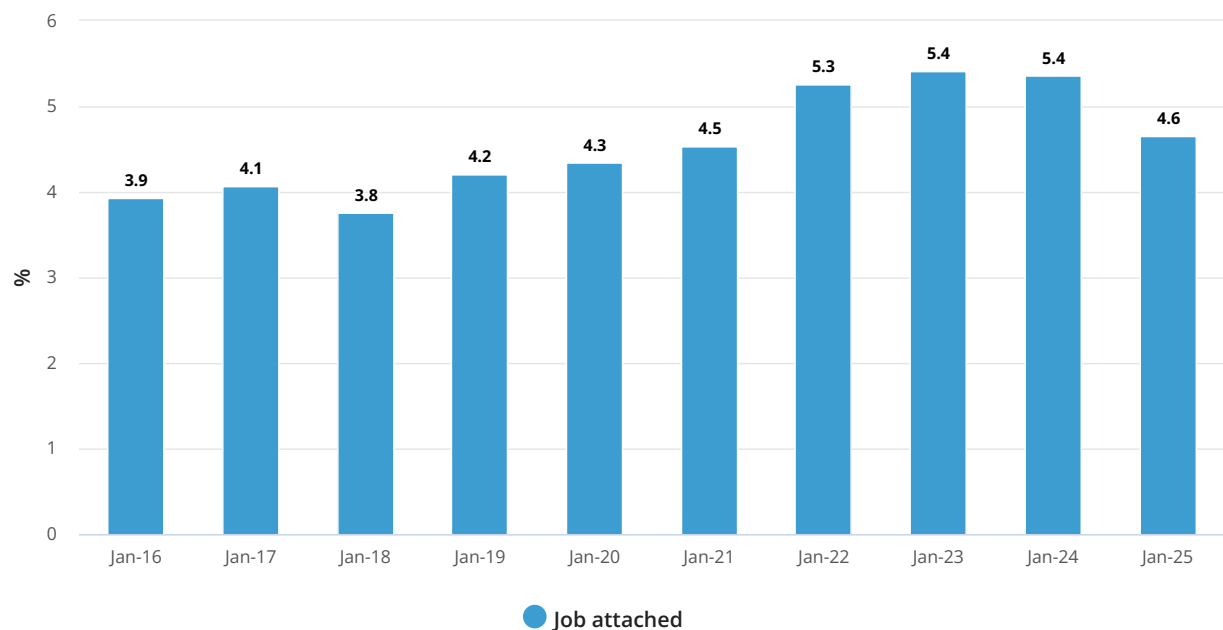
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Because people can belong to both cohorts, the sum of each individual population does not equal the total.

Proportions of job attachment

Chart 2 shows the proportion of people who were not employed (that is, either unemployed or not in the labour force) who had job attachment in January. The January 2025 proportion of 4.6 per cent is less than the 2022-24 January averages of around 5.3 per cent, but still above the 2016-2020 average (4.1 per cent).

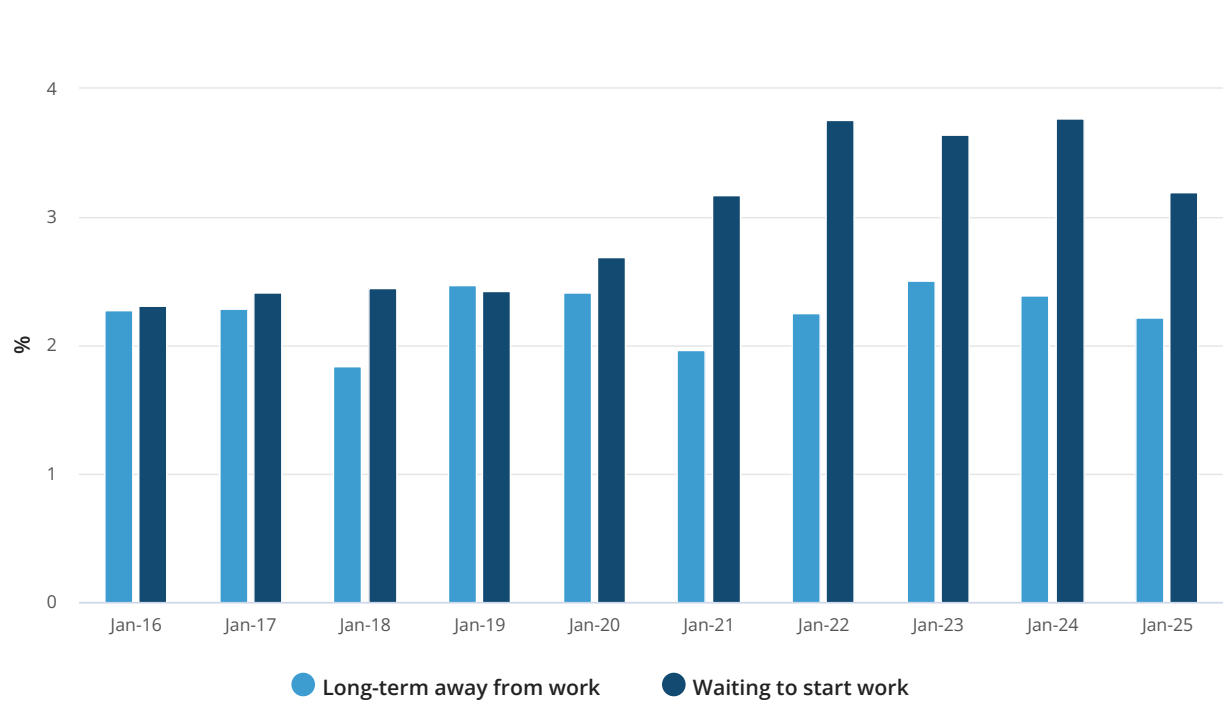
Chart 2: Proportion of not employed with job attachment, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Chart 3 shows that the decrease in the proportion of not employed who had job attachment was driven by a decrease in both the number of people who were waiting to start work and people who were long-term away from work. The proportion of long-term away from work in January 2025 of 2.2 per cent was slightly lower than the 2016-2020 average of 2.3 per cent. The proportion of people waiting to start work in January 2025 of 3.2 per cent was higher than the 2016-2020 average of 2.5 per cent.

Chart 3: People who were long-term away from work by labour force status, Original



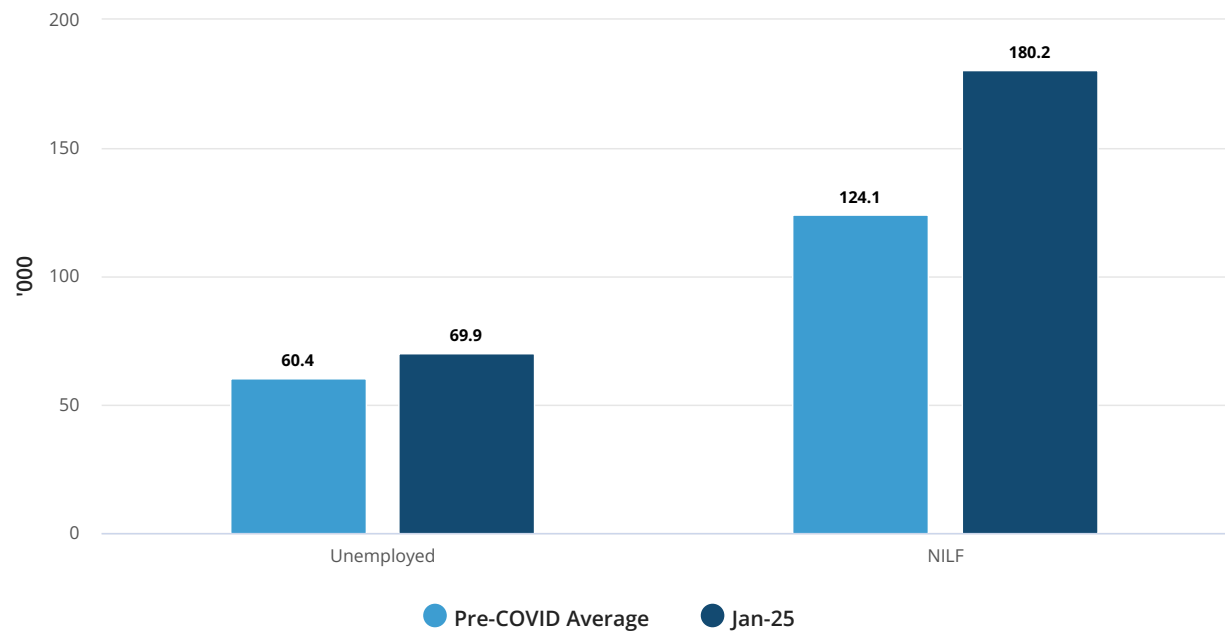
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Labour Force Status

Charts 4 and 5 show the changes in each of the populations which comprise the job attached population: people who were waiting to start work and the long-term away from work, by their labour force status.

Chart 4 shows that in January 2025 there were 180,200 people waiting to start work who were not in the labour force, compared to the pre-COVID average of 124,100. Additionally, there were more unemployed people who were waiting to start work (69,900 compared to the pre-COVID average of 60,400).

Chart 4: People who were waiting to start work by labour force status, Original

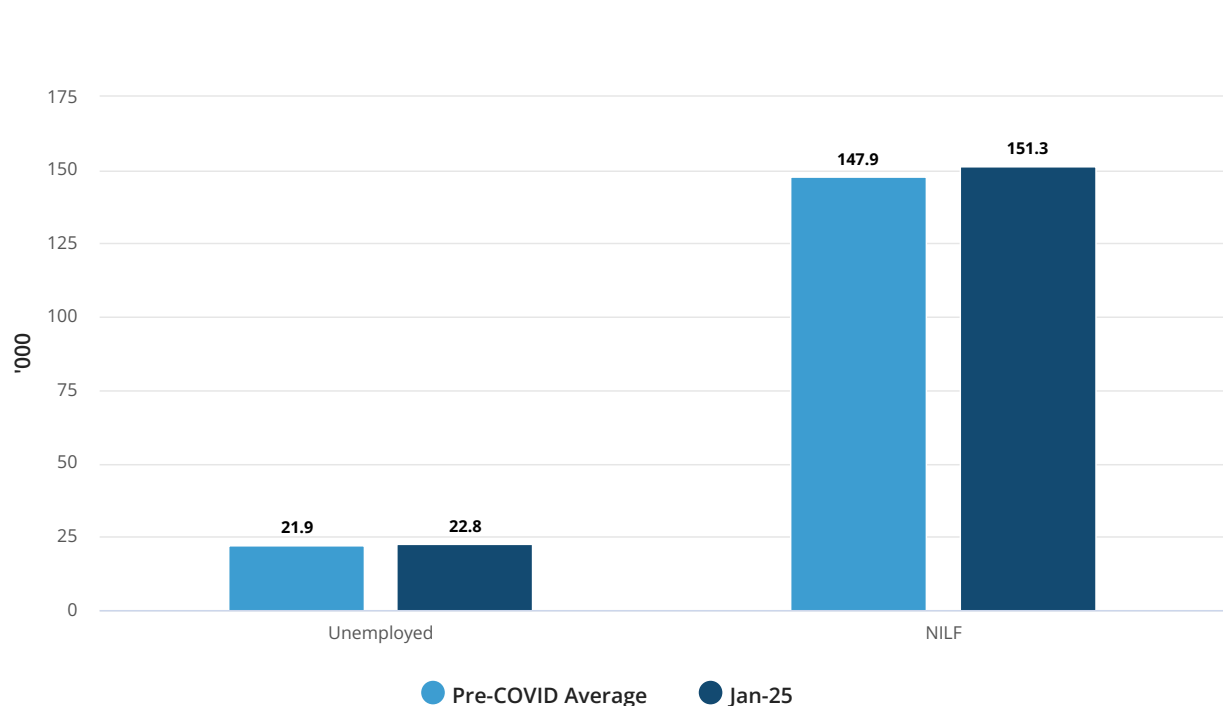


Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januarys in 2016-2020.

Chart 5 shows that there were marginally more unemployed who were long-term away from work in January 2025 (22,800 people compared to the pre-COVID average of 21,900 people). There were also more people who were not in the labour force and long-term away from work (151,300 people compared to the pre-COVID average of 147,900).

Chart 5: People who were long-term away from work by labour force status, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.
Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januarys in 2016-2020.

As there was not a large difference in the long-term away from work population in January 2025, the remainder of this article will focus on the waiting to start work population.

It initially explores those people who were not in the labour force, who are the larger of the two population groups.

It then explores unemployed people – who are referred to as ‘unemployed future starters’. The increase in the number of unemployed future starters is important to consider when interpreting the increase in the seasonally adjusted estimate of unemployment in January 2025, and the corresponding increase in the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate.

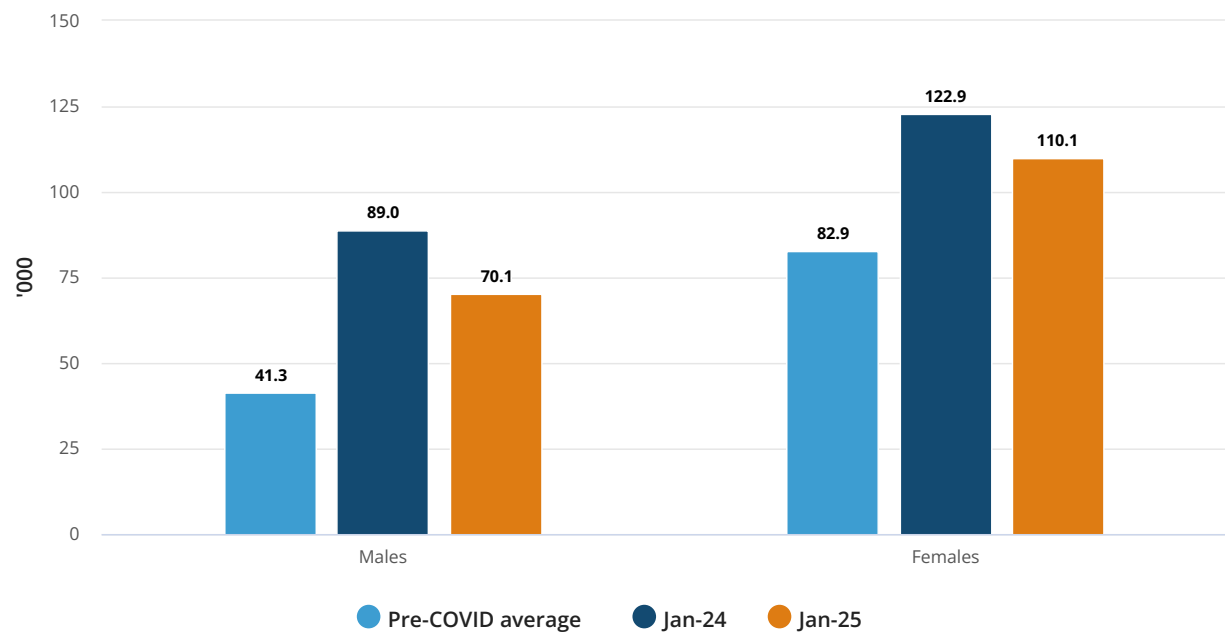
People waiting to start work who were not in the labour force

Sex

In January 2025, there were elevated levels in the number of people who were not in the labour force (those neither employed or unemployed) and waiting to start work, for both sexes.

Chart 6 shows there were around 70 per cent more males (70,100 compared to the pre-COVID average of 41,300) and around 33 per cent more females (110,100 compared to the pre-COVID average of 82,900). However, the January 2025 numbers are lower than January 2024, down 21 per cent and 10 per cent for males and females respectively.

Chart 6: People who were not in the labour force and waiting to start work by Sex, Original



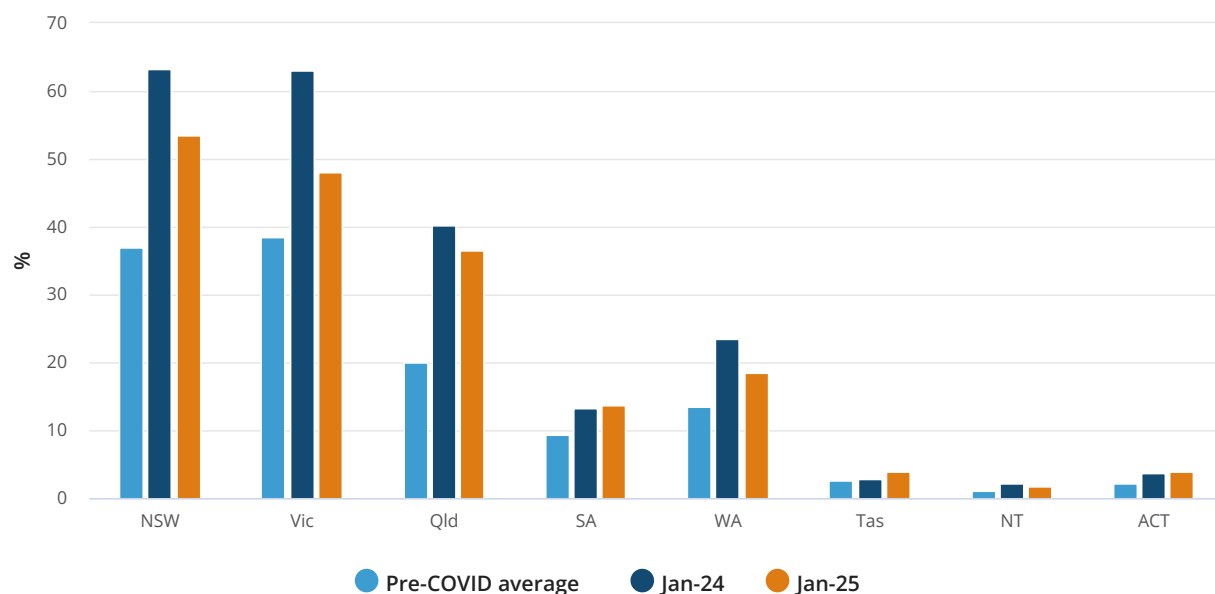
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januarys in 2016-2020.

State and Territory

Chart 7 shows that in January 2025, the levels of people waiting to start work who were not in the labour force were above pre-COVID averages in every state and territory, however only South Australia, Tasmania, and the Australian Capital Territory were above their January 2024 levels. It is important to note that many of these state and territory level estimates are relatively small and should be used with caution.

Chart 7: People who were not in the labour force and waiting to start work by State and Territory, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januarys in 2016-2020.

Through the year seasonal pattern

Chart 8 shows the proportion of people not in the labour force who were waiting to start work. Throughout 2022-2024, these people made up a consistently larger proportion of those not in the labour force compared to previous years. This was to be expected, given the smaller relative size of the not in the labour force population during a particularly tight labour market, with a high participation rate.

Contrasted to previous years, while 2024 did show elevated levels through the year, a December fall in the proportion went against the trend of the strong growth seen in corresponding periods in 2022 and 2023. The January 2025 proportion remained higher than pre-COVID levels, but was less than in the previous three years.

Chart 8: Proportion of people not in the labour force who were waiting to start work, Original

- Jan 2025, 2.5%

Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Unemployed future starters

In order to be considered unemployed a person must have not been employed during the reference week, and:

- had actively looked for work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and were available for work in the reference week; or
- were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and could have started in

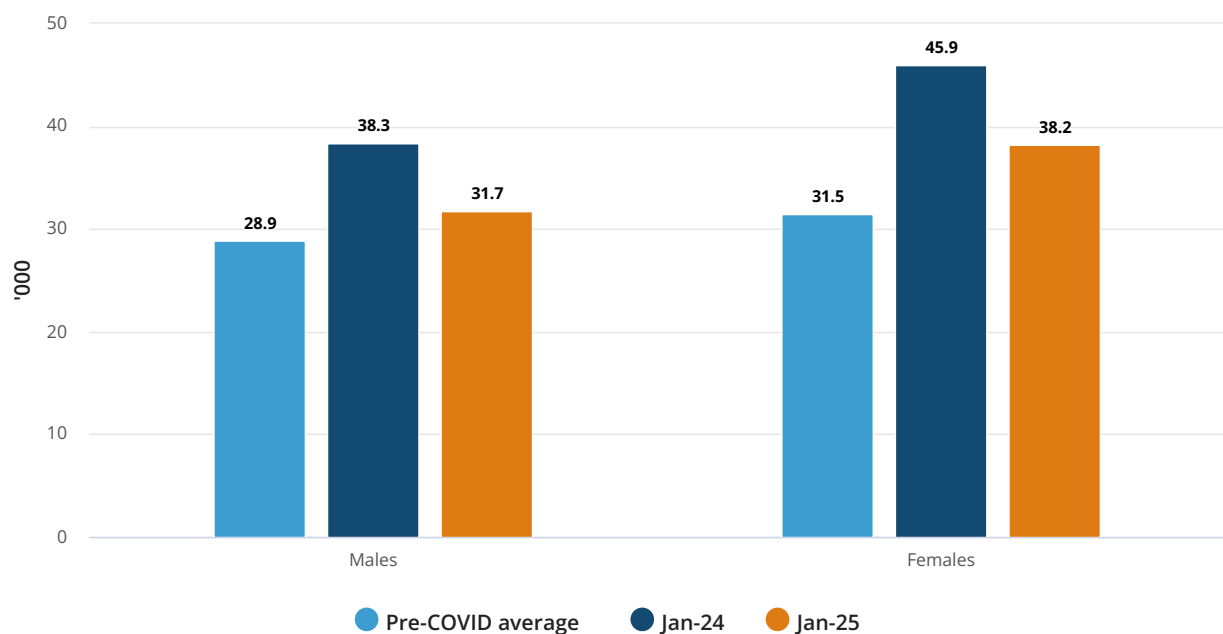
the reference week if the job had been available then.

The second of these groups of unemployed people is referred to by labour statisticians around the world as 'future starters'.

Sex

In January 2025, the number of unemployed future starters remained higher than pre-COVID levels. Chart 9 shows there were around 10 per cent more males (31,700 compared to the pre-COVID average of 28,900), and around 21 per cent more females (38,200 compared to the pre-COVID average of 31,500). However, the January 2025 numbers are lower than January 2024, down 17 per cent for both males and females.

Chart 9: Unemployed future starters by Sex, Original



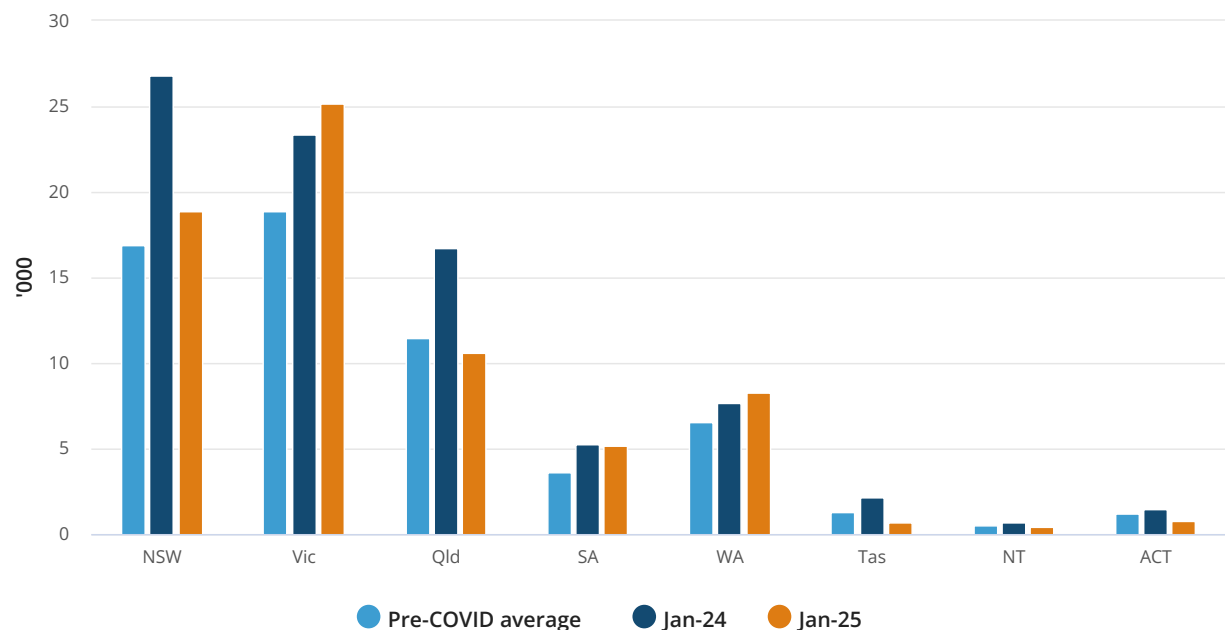
Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januarys in 2016-2020.

State and Territory

Chart 10 shows the variability in the number of unemployed future starters across states and territories. Half of the eight state and territories have unemployed future starter levels lower than the pre-COVID averages, with only Victoria and Western Australia recording levels higher than January 2024. It is important to note that many of these state and territory level estimates are relatively small and should be used with caution.

Chart 10: Unemployed future starters by State and Territory, Original



Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

Pre-COVID average was calculated as the average of Januarys in 2016-2020.

Through the year seasonal pattern

Chart 11 shows the proportion of unemployed who were 'Unemployed Future Starters'. For 2022-2024, these 'Future Starters' accounted for a consistently larger proportion of the unemployed compared to previous years. This was to be expected, given the smaller relative size of the unemployed population during a particularly tight labour market, with a low unemployment rate.

The recent decrease between November and December 2024 was far more pronounced than the previous November-December movements in 2022 and 2023. The resulting January 2025 figure, while elevated over pre-COVID levels is the lowest January proportion in the last four January periods.

Chart 11: Proportion of Unemployed who were waiting to start work, Original

- Jan 2025, 10.5%

Source: Longitudinal Labour Force, Australia.

How to contact us with questions or feedback

The ABS always seeks to provide guidance and advice to users to assist in interpreting changes in Labour Force data over time.

If you have a question or have any feedback on additional explanatory that would be useful, please contact us at labour.statistics@abs.gov.au (<mailto:labour.statistics@abs.gov.au>).

